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Date: March 24, 2020

GBCG Correspondence #20-008

To: Great Basin Incident Management Team Members  
Great Basin Incident Commanders/GB IC Council  
Great Basin Operations Committee

From: Chair, Great Basin Coordinating Group

Subject: Preparing Great Basin Incident Management Teams for COVID-19 associated responses

As we continue to prepare ourselves for the upcoming fire season, the Great Basin Coordinating Group wants to communicate how we should be addressing responding to incidents associated with COVID-19. While we all share the concern and priority of keeping our employees and the public safe, we also recognize the challenges that lay in front of us.

There is a large amount of information about COVID-19, little of that information directly relates to our mission of protecting our country's natural resources while caring for our public. The GBCG would like to disseminate information on on-going efforts, recognize our knowledge gaps and employ our best problem-solving resource we have; you, Incident Management Teams, responders and support personnel.

What we know:

1. NMAC has activated three Area Command Teams to begin the planning process for safe responses to incidents. Team 2 Sexton has been assigned the Great Basin, Southern Area and Northern Rockies Geographic Areas. Team 2 has also been given the Southern Area as well as the Northern Rockies GA. While their work will first focus on the SA as fire season is upon that GA, we can expect to begin interactions with Team 2 soon. The GBCG encourages GB IMTs to provide any information Team 2 requests as well as assist in any way to complete their tasking. Please refer to NMAC Correspondence 2020-06 for additional details.
2. NWCG has a document of specific steps IMTs and responders can take before, during and after an incident to ensure safety. These guidelines are largely based off lessons learned from previous incidents that had mass transmissions of infectious diseases. The GBCG encourages all IMTs and responders to heed these guidelines now and prepare for possible outcomes.  
<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/emergency-medical-committee/infectious-disease-guidance>
3. Emergency Support Function 4 (ESF#4) has been activated. There are currently two teams (one T1 and one T2) assigned in PNW to assist with the COVID -19 response. Both teams are assigned in a virtual manner. Great Basin Team 2, Demasters, has been activated to work virtually to provide COVID-19

support to the Forest Service Intermountain Region. As this is new to all of us, the GBCG is in communication with PNWCG to glean any lessons learned that we may use for our teams and future assignments. We expect additional assignments, not only in the virtual setting, but possibly on scene as well. GBCG continues to support Incident Commanders and responders performing assignment, task and location risk assessments to ensure proper mitigations are in place to maintain safety. GBCG expects proper pre-planning to identify those team members, tasks or situations that would place individuals in high risk environments and the appropriate arrangements to fill those needs.

4. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to provide up to date information on methods to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. GBCG asks all ICs and responders to be and informed of and institute these measures.

What we look to discover together:

1. The GBCG recognizes that there will be many decisions to make regarding our new environment. While the GBCG is taking steps to ready GB IMTs, all should recognize the immense unknown we are facing. Effective and timely information sharing will be paramount to everyone's safety and success. Please provide feedback, submit questions and look for solutions with your fellow ICs, responders and GBCG members and Liaisons.
2. Certainly, one of the most daunting tasks we will face is establishing effective logistical support to our teams and responders in the face of the Pandemic. Fire camps have always provided challenges in maintaining a hygienic environment for those on scene and the surrounding public. GBCG encourages innovation, collaborative problem solving and proper risk mitigation.
3. The unknown situation always presents itself as a unique challenge. We must pace ourselves, clearly identify what our challenge is without losing our way in the myriad of unknowns and address our concerns in an effective manner. While addressing known issues is always easier, we must also look to planning for unexpected outcomes.

The GBCG wants to ensure we are planning for a proper response, performing effective execution of our plans, innovative adaptation to the situation variables and compassionate care after the assignment. We are facing unusual and stressful situations. This situation will not only tax our physical well-being, but also our mental health. We encourage all IMT members and responders to utilize available resources to address mental health needs.

Thanks to all our community for the incredible resilience and willingness to respond to other's needs.

*Dennis Strange*

/s/

Vice Chair, Great Basin Coordinating Group